

Message Text

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44

ACTION EA-09

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INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19893

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJECT: REFORMISM AND RECENT ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVES

REF: BANGKOK A-286 OCTOBER 17, 1974

SUMMARY: THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT HAS RECENTLY TAKEN SEVERAL SMALL STEPS TOWARD ATTACKING OFFICIAL CORRUPTION, NOTABLY A REFORM OF THE CIVIL SERVICE STRUCTURE. BUT THESE EFFORTS ARE RUNNING INTO TROUBLE FROM VESTED INTERESTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE PARLIAMENT. THE RESISTANCE TO REFORM DEMONSTRATES THE PRESENT WEAKNESSES OF REFORMISTS WITHIN THE THAI POLITY. END SUMMARY.

1. OFFICIAL CORRUPTION IS PROBABLY THE SINGLE MOST DIFFICULT AND SERIOUS PROBLEM FACING THAILAND TODAY. INVOLVING MORE THAN JUST ABUSE OF POWER AND INFLUENCE PEDDLING IT INFECTS THE ENTIRE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT, AFFECTING THE FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC POLICY, THE ALLOCATION OF PUBLIC RESOURCES, PROMOTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS
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WITHIN THE CIVIL MILITARY BUREAUCRACIES, AND VIRTUALLY

EVERY OTHER PHASE OF GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY.

2. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT IS KNOWN TO FEEL THAT THE ELIMINATION OF CORRUPT PRACTICES IS AN ESSENTIAL AND IMMEDIATE TASK. HOWEVER, HIS GOVERNMENT HAS UNTIL RECENTLY DONE LITTLE ABOUT IT, AND SEVERAL MINISTERS AND HIGH LEVEL APPOINTEES OF HIS ADMINISTRATION ARE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN CORRUPTION IN THE PAST. REFORM IN THAILAND ALWAYS FACES STRONG OPPOSITION FROM THOSE WHO STAND TO LOSE UNDER A REFORM SYSTEM. THE LIFTING OF RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND PRESS FREEDOMS, HOWEVER, HAS MEANT THAT THE MORE BLATANT INSTANCES OF CORRUPTION ARE NOT SO EASILY IGNORED BY THOSE IN POWER AS THEY ONCE WERE. AND THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION FINALLY APPEARS TO BE TAKING LIMITED BUT CONCRETE STEPS TOWARDS REFORM.

THE POSITION CLASSIFICATION CONTROVERSY.

3. AN IMPORTANT REFORMIST MOVE WAS THE RECENT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POSITION CLASSIFICATION (PC) SYSTEM IN THE CIVIL BUREAUCRACY. THE P.C. SYSTEM RESULTED FROM A USAID FUNDED PROJECT BEGUN IN 1965, AND HAS ALREADY BEEN USED SUCCESSFULLY IN SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS FOR YEARS. IN 1974 THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY PASSED A LAW APPLYING IT TO ALL CIVIL SERVANTS. THE NEW SYSTEM WILL REFORM THE SYSTEM OF JOB ASSIGNMENTS AND PROMOTIONS. IT ALSO TAKES POWER AWAY FROM DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS GENERAL AND TRANSFERS IT TO UNDER-SECRETARIES. THIS ASPECT HAS DRAWN CONSERVATIVE FIRE BECAUSE IT REDUCES THE ABILITY OF POLITICIANS TO INTERFERE WITH THE BUREAUCRACY. FURTHERMORE, PREVIOUS THAI ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE IS THAT THE DIRECTORS GENERAL ARE THE POWER LOCI IN ANY MINISTRY.

4. THE THAI NATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PARLIAMENTARIANS QUICKLY DRAFTED LEGISLATION TO ABOLISH OR WATER DOWN THE P.C. SYSTEM SHORTLY AFTER ITS EARLY SEPTEMBER IMPLEMENTATION. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT HAS NOW BEEN FORCED BY CONSERVATIVES IN HIS COALITION TO WITHDRAW OPEN SUPPORT FOR THE P.C. SYSTEM. THE PRESENT TERM OF THIS PARLIAMENT EXPIRED SEPT. 19 (NOT REPEAT NOT SEPT. 27 AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED), AND THE CONFIDENTIAL

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LEGISLATION TO REPEAL THE P.C. SYSTEM WAS NOT INTRODUCED IN TIME. IT IS EXPECTED THAT A SPECIAL SESSION WILL BE SUMMONED IN OCTOBER (DATE NOT YET CLEAR), AND THERE IS A GOOD POSSIBILITY THAT PARLIAMENT WILL WATER DOWN OR REPEAL THE 1974 LEGISLATION, BUT OPPONENTS MAY NOW HAVE TIME TO BUILD THEIR DEFENSE.

5. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT THIS WEEK RESURRECTED THE

MORIBUND ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMITTEE. THIS IS POTENTIALLY A VERY POWERFUL ORGANIZATION WITH ROOTS GOING BACK TO THE THANOM KITTIKACHON GOVERNMENT. MOST OF THE PRESENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS HAVE UNTAINTED BACKGROUNDS AS FAR AS IS PUBLICLY KNOWN. AND SOME SUCH AS NEW DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE LT. GENERAL SISUK MAHINTHORATHEP ARE INFLUENTIAL MEN IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. HOWEVER, THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHOICE FOR SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OFFICE, SAWAT CHAIKUN, HAS PREVIOUSLY COME UNDER CHARGES OF CORRUPTION HIMSELF. THE ACTIVITIES OF THIS OFFICE WILL INDICATE MUCH ABOUT THE DIRECTION THAILAND WILL GO IN ELIMINATING CORRUPTION.

6. THE CURRENT INVESTIGATION OF FORMER ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION DEPARTMENT, ARUN ITSARAPHAKE, MAY ALSO BE A SIGNIFICANT STEP IN ATTACKING CORRUPTION. AMONG OTHER THINGS, ARUN IS ACCUSED OF USING HIS POSITION TO HAVE CHARGES DROPPED AGAINST SUKRI SUKRIPHOM, A NOTORIOUS DRUG TRAFFICKER CAUGHT IN THE ACT, AND FORMER FIRE BRIGADE COMMANDER POLICE MAJOR GENERAL CHETCHAN PRAWIT, WHO WAS INVOLVED IN A LAND SCANDAL. UNDER PREVIOUS REGIMES SOMEONE IN ARUN'S POSITION WOULD ALMOST SURELY HAVE ESCAPED RETRIBUTION. SHOULD ARUN BE PENALIZED, IT WILL BE A WARNING TO OTHERS IN SIMILAR POSITIONS. THE OUTCOME OF THIS CASE WILL TELL WHETHER THAT ASPECT OF THAI POLITICS IS REALLY CHANGING.

7. COMMENT: IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW MUCH OF AN EFFORT PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT CAN PUT INTO REFORM OF THE BUREAUCRACIES. HE HAS MADE IMPORTANT BUT LIMITED STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. BUT THE STRONG CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION ROUSED BY THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE P.C. SYSTEM DEMONSTRATES HOW HARD IT WILL BE FOR THIS OR ANY

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OTHER GOVERNMENT TO CLEAN UP AND MODERNIZE ITSELF. AND IF CONSERVATIVES DO MANAGE TO REPEAL THE P.C. SYSTEM, IT WILL BE A SERIOUS SET-BACK FOR THAILAND, AS IT WILL CERTAINLY PUT A BRAKE ON FURTHER REFORM. IT WILL ALSO DEMONSTRATE THAT REFORMIST ELEMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING KHUKRIT HIMSELF, WILL NEED A GOOD DEAL MORE POLITICAL CLOUT IF THEY ARE EVER TO EFFECT ANY SERIOUS CHANGE.
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